

# Exist—Somehow

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*The Mainichi newspapers of Tokyo sent a team of correspondents to South Viet-Nam to write about the people, the soldiers and the Viet Cong guerrillas—giving emphasis to the human paradoxes of that strange war, rather than to the fighting itself. This adaptation of what they found was prepared by Washington Post Staff Writer Sterling Seagrave.*

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## *His feet gave him away . . . Ho Chi Minh sandals.*

ON BOTH SIDES OF THE ROAD 70 miles from Saigon, the flooded, pale-green paddy fields gave way to stands of yellow bamboo and clumps of dense green jungle. It was a hot mid-afternoon, and only the riotously plumed paddy birds soaring on thermals over the ripening rice tassels noticed the passing jeep.

"Cham! Cham!"  
The jeep screeched to a stop. In the passenger seat Mainichi correspondent Kenkichi Konishi was startled out of a warm doze.

Blocking the road were three Vietnamese in army uniforms, rifles at ready.

The soldiers surrounded the jeep. Konishi, the driver and the interpreter climbed out and raised their hands over their heads.

Then, looking across the road, Konishi saw another Vietnamese standing in the deep grass in the roadside ditch. He wore a black homespun shirt, baggy black trousers, and a green woven-bamboo hat. He held a semiautomatic rifle pointed at them. On his bare feet were black sandals cut from the tires of a United States Army truck. They were "Ho Chi Minh sandals."

He was a Viet Cong.

While the three Communist guerrillas searched and interrogated Konishi's driver and interpreter, the Viet Cong commander looked Konishi over. Then he laughed.

"This is the first time I have ever seen a Japanese."

An hour later Konishi and his companions were released after questioning.

## A Traitor Was Betrayed

SHUNJIRO ISHIZUKA met his first Viet Cong in a bloody episode culminated by a firing squad.

The rainy season was ending and the Mekong River was running high and yellow. In the morning, the party Ishizuka accompanied set out aboard three armed motor launches from the elite 7th Division's headquarters at My Tho, 40 miles southwest of Saigon.

The torpid heat and the fetid stink of the Mekong Delta swamps made everyone drowsy—until the putt-putt of the engines was interrupted by a loud "Bang!"

"VC snipers," grunted Capt. King, the American military adviser.

The three launches charged into the mangroves. Swans flushed up into the sky. One launch emerged towing a sampan and a captive.

His name was Phan Le Thanh. He wore only a pair of black shorts and thick spectacles.

He denied being a sniper. He claimed he was a CIA agent. He showed papers which purported to show he was on assignment for Special Forces. A snapshot showed him dressed as a Vietnamese policeman. In Viet Cong country, such documents are suicidal.

Finally, after gentlemanly interrogation, it was certain that he was a Viet Cong and had even been captured before.

He had been released when he promised to change his ways, but he had soon returned to his old haunts in the Go Cong district and had become a district guerilla leader. When a Viet Cong is captured twice, he is almost certain to be put to death.

Realizing that his forged papers were serving only to dig his grave, Phan Le Thanh offered to show the way.

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